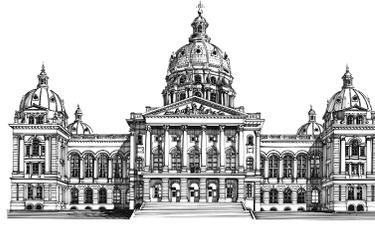

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State Capitol
Des Moines, IA 50319
December 16, 1993

Boot Camp As An Alternative To Prison

ISSUE

A review of research on the utilization of boot camps as an alternative to incarceration in prison or probation.

AFFECTED AGENCIES

Department of Corrections (DOC)

Community-Based Corrections (CBC)

Parole Board

Judicial Department

CODE AUTHORITY

Section 11, SF 267 (FY 1994 Justice System Appropriations Bill)

BACKGROUND

SF 267 established the Intermediate Sanctions Task Force to examine and make recommendations about the criminal sanctions that emphasize a high degree of offender control within the community. One segment of the Task Force plan is to consider and make recommendations for a boot camp program to meet the needs of youthful offenders. This is due to the increase in crime involving juveniles, particularly drug-related and violent crime.

CURRENT SITUATION

The U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) has identified a growing trend in the use of boot camps; 26 states had 57 boot camps at the beginning of 1993, compared to only 11 states with boot camps in 1989. Boot camp programs generally espouse a philosophy of turning around the offender before he or she commits a major crime. Boot camp programs usually target young, nonviolent, first-time offenders who have not committed major felonies. The programs have a military format emphasizing precision drills, physical exercise, hard physical labor, and close discipline. Boot camp programs also include counseling, substance abuse

treatment, and educational rehabilitation. Most participants are male, but there are some boot camps for female offenders.

Boot camp programs are a form of "shock incarceration," that is, a short, stressful experience that encourages reform by the offender. In establishing these programs, officials generally cite anticipated benefits of improving recidivism rates, reducing overall building and operating costs, and lessening prison overcrowding.

Because boot camp programs are relatively new, little evaluation has been done which makes it difficult to determine their actual effectiveness. Program administrators have been asked about their perceptions of boot camp programs with the following results:

- They often believe the programs are successful at improving self-image.
- The boot camps are providing an alternative to incarceration.
- The drug treatment and education rehabilitation programs with the boot camps are effective.
- The boot camps are addressing the public's dissatisfaction with traditional forms of incarceration.

Boot camp participants tend to report the shock program is a difficult but constructive experience. Traditional prison inmates do not view their experience as constructive.

While recidivism is methodologically difficult to measure, most reports show boot camps do not reduce recidivism. In its report, the GAO noted that no state reported a statistically significant difference when comparing similar offenders serving different types of sentences. Additionally, boot camps do not prevent future criminal behavior. Success may be contingent on a strong program emphasis on rehabilitation during boot camp incarceration and effective aftercare during a period of community supervision. Boot camps rely on close supervision and highly structured living arrangements.

Returning the individual to the environment which originally fostered the illicit behavior without a continued monitoring reinforces inappropriate past behavior patterns and overwhelms the positive experience of the shock incarceration. The positive changes cannot be maintained without continued support away from the boot camp's structure and discipline. This means that aftercare is important to keep the offender from slipping back into his or her old ways of thinking and behaving.

BUDGET IMPACT

One of the goals of boot camps is to reduce costs. Programs tend to consistently report savings over traditional incarceration. Boot camp programs require more staff and higher operating costs than prisons or community-based programs because of their intensive supervision and training. In terms of average daily costs, boot camps are more expensive than prison, jail, or probation. For example, the New York boot camp program costs \$69.00 per day while the average daily costs for an inmate in a medium security prison is \$60.00 and \$51.00 for a minimum security prison. While the average daily cost is often greater than traditional prison costs, boot camps are less expensive overall because offenders have shorter stays, normally ranging from 90 to 180 days instead of 2 years in prison. If the boot camp participants are diverted from prison, then the shorter periods of incarceration result in savings in excess of the higher daily costs.

However, if boot camp participants are offenders who otherwise would have received probation, then the program will increase costs. This "widens the net" putting more offenders into the system where they receive more expensive treatment before moving on to community supervision.

Reducing prison overcrowding is another cost-saving goal of boot camps. At the present time, there are too few boot camps to significantly reduce prison populations by diverting prison-bound offenders. Given that boot camp graduates recidivate at about the same rate as other offenders, any savings from reductions in overcrowding would be gained by having a shorter initial period of incarceration among those who are not repeat offenders.

Additionally, if boot camps "widen the net" by taking in offenders who would have received probation, then persons who fail boot camp will end up in prison. This means that offenders who probably would not have been in prison end up there, and results in an increase in inmate populations and prison costs. This would be another reason to send only prison-bound offenders to boot camps.

If boot camp programs are to be effective, they will need to build on the participants' positive change experiences in the camp and provide effective aftercare treatment. Since boot camp programs are new, continued evaluation and further refinement will be necessary to insure success.

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